

Margaret Lee

*Bad, Immediately*

7 January 2021 - 6 February, 2021

Opening day

Thursday, 7 January, 12 pm - 7pm

*Suspense arouses expectations but what good are expectations if they inevitably end in disappointment. Been thinking about ways up, out and around but I keep coming back to accepting that bad immediately is just fine.*

- ML, 2021 NYC

Bisecting the gallery in Margaret Lee's exhibition *Bad, Immediately* is a new sculptural installation comprised of rope and nails. The suspended rope, which is tangled midway between ground and ceiling, snakes along the gallery's floor, and ends in a knot. A sense of heaviness is suggested by the placement of coils on scales. Nails tenuously hold the arrangement together. The cord's fraying fabric anticipates strain.

Ropes have been making the rounds in Lee's work. In the artist's previous exhibition at Jack Hanley Gallery, *It's not that I'm not taking (this) seriously* (2016), a large, freestanding sculpture featured a rope slung over a wall. A knotted loop on the back of this was attached to a single screw, while twelve plaster bananas hung on the front. Ropes, for Lee, express the ambiguous potential of infrastructure. Such objects can carry a gallows humor, or invoke a feeling of being twisted. Concurrently, however, ropes can hold things and spaces together, or foreground the possibility of connection. Their value is defined by their use. They are relational objects.

A meditation on infrastructure likewise informs the eight new abstract paintings featured in the exhibition. These have been rendered in an understated palette of white, black and magenta. Torn sections of newspaper are embedded into the ground of the canvases, some more legible than others.

Care has been given to the preparation of each canvas, giving the gesso a compositional presence. The application of paint in lines, patches and rectangles bring to mind the incidental markings that are often visible on the walls of urban buildings and passageways. The presence of grids and simple color gradients further recalls the built environment. In this series, the painting's ground can be interpreted as a metaphor for the base—the fabric of material relations upon which economic value is created. In their spare, non-representational poetics, the paintings weigh the possibility of what the sociologist Herbert Marcuse described as a “double reality,” where refusal is possible, established language and images fail, and form holds the contradictions that point toward psychological or social transformation. By calling the eye toward the canvas, the artworks consider the competing pressures that are contained in an object's surface.

Through these sculptural and painterly gestures, *Bad, Immediately* reflects on the frustrations of moving up and putting out. Yet while grounded in a degree of suspicion toward the present, the exhibition, as its title subtly intimates, seeks to move past the here and now. Letting go of current expectations can, in certain instances, lead to the understanding that things can change. Driven by this observation, the exhibition searches for an artistic language that signals beyond what is immediately given, and towards a vision of a world that is rebuilt from bottom to top.

*Margaret Lee has organized and exhibited work at numerous venues domestically and internationally. A selection of the artist's recent solo and group exhibitions includes: (2020) For a Dreamer of Houses, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX (2016) Duddell's x DMA: Concentrations HK: Margaret Lee, Duddell's, Hong Kong, China (2016) de, da, do...da, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Public collections include: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Dallas Museum of Art, Dikeou Collection, Rubell Family Collection, and the Astrup Fearnley Museet. In 2009, Lee founded the artist-run space 179 Canal and is the co-founder of the gallery 47 Canal.*

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